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"BRITISH THIN RED LINE" CAUSES CONFUSION TO ENEMY
From Norman Clark, representing the Combined
British Press.

With Allied Beach-head
Forces, Anzio, Saturday.

For a week during the Germans' first heavy attack against the beach-head a "British thin red line" was strung out along two miles of the perimeter defences.

172 men who manned this line held off at least two enemy battalions and by aggressive night patrolling caused chaos and confusion in the enemy camp. These were the men of the first British Reconnaissance Regiment, the Reconnaissance Corps. Their spirited interpretation of their defensive role proved a decisive factor in countering the enemy's first testing thrust against the beach-head.

The Colonel - a Malay born Irishman was telling us about his men. There was no defence in depth then - just 86 men dug in along 1800 yards and a similar number of another squadron holding another mile. No depth? "Well, we knocked a hole in the kitchen wall of a farmhouse to make a gun slit and into that kitchen we drove an armoured car. We had our mortars too and twelve anti-tank guns with a field battery of 25 pounders we 'could' call on if we were in trouble. They were to stand us in good stead in the days that followed. Our first worry was a wood 150 yards in front of our squadron.

"We sent a patrol out on the first night we were in our unaccustomed role as troops of the line. They found an enemy tank harbour; many tank track marks but no sign that there were any enemy in the wood. On the way back they met two enemy patrols and had a brush with them. But nobody was killed.

"What puzzled us was the amount of fire movement by day from the wood. Mortar fire was particularly troublesome and we couldn't make it out how the wood became alive with Germans during the day. At night we covered the approaches and nothing could get into it in daylight without being observed. So Sergeant William Parker - his home is at 10 Crowhurst Road, Colchester, Essex, - took a daylight patrol into the wood, killed three and brought three back as prisoners. These turned out to be the enemy's mortar observation post crew and we had no more bother from mortars after that.

There was sniping, however, from the forward edge of the wood. They wounded a despatch rider who was crawling up one hundred and fifty yards away. But there was no more accurate fire after that. We decided to do some aggressive night work but

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before we could jump off we were attacked by an enemy force two companies strong. We called on the gunners and they stopped the attack in its tracks. Two hours later the enemy tried again and got within fifty yards of us. The position was serious, so we asked the gunners if they could do a map sheet. "Yes," they said, "if we didn't mind ten per cent casualties". The barrage came down but was so accurate that we had no one so much as scratched.

"The enemy withdrew, and the day was quiet after that. That night we decided to try and clear out four farmhouses which the enemy held in strength behind the wood. We got a twenty minute artillery preparation; then moved out of our lines. The leading assault troop cleared out the first house without much trouble, although the Germans tossed hand grenades at us from the upper windows. The next farmhouse was twenty yards away and a machine-gun, firing on a fixed line about two feet off the ground, pinned the assault party to the ground between the two houses.

"The fire from this machine-gun was nasty and it annoyed Lieutenant John Alexander McNeil (47, Linn Drive, Blue Road, Glasgow). So he collected a Bren gun and walked calmly forward firing it at everything and then running the last 50 yards. There was not very much moon about but he spotted the slot the machine-gun was firing through and rolled three hand grenades into it.

"Another trooper with a two inch mortar gave them the bombs as well. That stopped the trouble from the machine-gun.

"Just as they were getting into the front door they spotted reinforcements coming down a side road. So they lay up for them with four Bren guns and waited until the German party were within 20 yards. Then they let them have it. Nobody in that twenty arrived anywhere.

"Next, fixed line fire came at McNeil's troop from a wood between their position and our lines. It wasn't until we sent a patrol into that wood later that we found out how the enemy had got there. In a big hole in the ground covered with corrugated sheet iron and undergrowth a hundred Germans lived by day watching our patrols moving about trying to solve the mystery of the empty wood that filled with Germans at night.

"The attack on the four houses was causing chaos in the enemy camp but before the last two houses could be tackled it started to get light and everything in heaven and earth came down on the assault parties. We put down a smoke screen and got them back. Next night we went through the same drill, with the twenty minute artillery preparation but didn't send the patrols out. The enemy's fixed lines blazed away, flares and very lights went up. We had worried the Bosche until he was jittery and didn't know
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what was attacking him."

Then there were the hair-raising exploits of "Beal's patrols". Lieutenant Richard George Arthur Beal, whose home is at 8, Joyce Avenue, Sherwood, Notts, is six foot something with the build of a strong man. He is in difficulties when riding in an armoured car and he has to squirm under the turret shields if it has to be closed under fire. In the early days of the beachhead, when reconnaissance patrols were reaching out to make contact with the enemy, Beal found the German out-post lines manned by paratroops on the Buon Riposa Ridge and "got among them" with two scout cars for a couple of hours. He pushed out along a road and came upon two half-track vehicles and 88's with Germans walking about having breakfast.

Befa

In the first half-hour he used up seventeen boxes of ammunition and had to send back for more. His turret was filled with the empty cartridge cases. Next, finding German engineers preparing a road and railway bridge for demolition, he killed eighteen of them and prevented the bridge from being blown up.

On another patrol an enemy anti-tank gun was making things unpleasant. One shell removed the front portion of his turret shield. Then Beal engaged the anti-tank gun in a fifteen minute fight, finally knocking it out. Passing this position he came upon two full infantry companies in a bivouac area and hurtled down the lines firing all his guns. As he careered headlong among the enemy, Beal came to a road block, tried to shoot it down, and, becoming bogged when he left the road, came under fire from an anti-tank gun and heavy machine guns. As he put his head down to switch on the inter communication system "a nice five group rapid" of small arms fire holed his map shield. All his tyres - they were "run flats" - were riddled and the brake system failed when the hydraulic circuit packed up. But Beal got his car back to the workshops, where thirty holes had to be welded and countless others patched.

In this same action a second car patrol, commanded by Lieutenant Philip Morman Grinley, of "Elstree", West Common, Haywards Heath, Sussex, moved out to cover the withdrawal of Beal's troop.

All the cars of this patrol became bogged. The drivers dug out the armoured cars and scout cars and hooked tow chains on under small arms. Between them the patrols of Beal and Grinley accounted for 145 enemy killed, and destroyed two 88's on self-propelled mountings, two infantry guns, two 81 millimeter mortars complete with crews, and set a "soft skin" vehicle on fire. They also came back with definite information of the German paratroop-held out-post line, plotting it with six figure map reference exactness, and assessing the enemy strength almost to a man. Next day the squadron attempted to repeat the performance.

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After cleaning up eighteen machine-gun nests, they were halted by a crater in the road. The Colonel said, "In a moment the whole area came to life around the leading armoured car - they had come up against a defensive line the enemy had moved forward overnight. The amount of additional fire and mortars and guns the patrol attracted was something to be wondered at.

"The driver doesn't know how he got out of it to this day - and neither does the crew."

Another attempt to reach Buon Riposa Ridge next day did not succeed. The enemy were reacting strongly to our landings. To get across a bridge a patrol had to leave its cars and work as dismounted infantry. They got the bridge and held it. The leading car, in which was Lieutenant Trenbath, of 11, Kenwyn Road, Truro, Cornwall, went up on a mine, knocking out the front suspension. An enemy anti-tank gun then came to life, but Trenbath and his crew were able to haul the car, under fire, into a hull-down position. The enemy were digging-in below a crest and the patrol was in action for the rest of the day. Finally, an enemy 105 millimetre anti-tank gun knocked out Trenbath's armoured car, but neither he, his gunner or his driver was hurt. A second armoured car in the patrol also got a direct hit. As the Colonel expressed it, "Our patrols either live long enough or they don't." This one did. In a colossal fire fight that went on all day the six Besa guns expended eight turret-loads, and a turret load is something like 4,000 rounds of small calibre ammunition and seventy of large.

A three inch mortar section under Sergeant Richard Siddons, who was a builder before the war, and whose home is at 11 Wordsworth Drive, Sinfyn, Derby, broke up counter-attack after counter-attack. "The mortars did yeoman service all day," said the colonel.

Despite the heavy fire to which the patrol was subjected all day only one other rank was killed, four wounded and one missing. One medium car, two light armoured cars and a carrier were lost. Six German machine-guns were brought back and other claims included an infantry gun knocked out and a half-track vehicle destroyed. The colonel told us, too, of Driver John Edgar Clubley, of 1, Wold View, Brandesburnt, Driffield, Yorkshire. The officer in his armoured car was wounded in both legs when the car went up on a mine at a cross-roads. While the gunner blazed away at an enemy nest Clubley got his officer into a ditch and then carried him a hundred yards to a jeep which evacuated the casualty to hospital. "Then," said the colonel, "Clubley got bloody minded and, getting into another car, drove it slap at a German machine-gun and wrote off the gun and its crew." During days of desperate fighting

in the Carroceto area, fire parties established by the Regiment saved the situation time and again.

On one occasion the activities of these outposts saved a reserve company and a battalion headquarters by its boldness. Rushing up a road, the armoured cars fired at everything they could see as the enemy came on in infantry rushes. "The ground was littered next day with the bodies of German dead," said the Colonel. "We kept the heads of the enemy down with a roving, three-inch mortar detachment we sent out. The enemy brought in sixteen tanks which stood too far off to be reached by our anti-tank guns, but we still dominated the landscape although company after company was over-run at night when the enemy infiltrated. Squadrons of assault troops took on everybody and everything, although it was the eleventh successive night on which they had been out on patrols. They brought back six prisoners and killed eleven for certain. There was much hand-to-hand fighting during this period. In no-man's-land we suddenly saw the turret of one of our armoured cars, which we thought had been knocked out, begin to turn, all machine-guns firing at thirty yards range at an anti-tank gun and its crew, which it annihilated. The car had been hit, but it had sat there for three hours for just such a chance as this.

Then there was the armoured car that found itself eight hundred yards behind the enemy lines in this confused fighting. It was bogged, but at night the crew built a road with stones and brushwood and after "a pretty fire fight" on the way got back to our positions. The "brains" as the Colonel expressed it behind this episode was Sergeant George Henry David Loryman, of West Wood, Peterborough, Northants. The six armoured cars under his command kept a German battalion "occupied" for 24 hours.

In the period between February 9-16 when "the Bosche went mad", as a senior officer has put it, the Regiment provided assault parties with other infantry regiments, gave covering fire from their armoured cars, and rallied broken ranks. The Colonel's report ends: "And a large amount of slaughter was inflicted".

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